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## Notes on Some Hebrew Words in Ecclesiastes

Biblical scholars in general are well provided with lexicographical resources – not least among them now the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, edited by David Clines. The inclusion by this work of new words and meanings found only in Ben Sira and the Qumran texts has been especially helpful for those of us working on late biblical materials, and students of Ecclesiastes, in particular, have had the benefit also in recent years of Antoon Schoors' magisterial work on the language of Qohelet, the second volume of which is devoted to a consideration of the book's vocabulary.<sup>1</sup> There are many words in Ecclesiastes, however, which remain problematic for one reason or another, and, by way of tribute to David, I want to explore a few such lexical problems here.

### 1. אנסכה

This word appears in Eccl 2:1, where Qohelet tells us:

אמרתי אני בלבי לכה־נא אנסכה בשמחה וראה בטוב

Here he is speaking “in his heart” (as at 2:15; 3:17-18), and the challenge which he proposes is essentially to himself: he is going to do something involving pleasure. The sense of the closing imperative וראה בטוב is not entirely certain itself, as we shall see, but it does not raise significant problems. The meaning of אנסכה, on the other hand, is much more difficult to determine, and has been the focus of considerable discussion. This word is most easily parsed as a cohortative form from נסך, “pour”, and that understanding underpins both a certain amount of subsequent Jewish interpretation and Jerome's Vulgate rendering, *affluam*. It is difficult to find a good sense for נסך here, however, especially since there is no direct object for the verb. Whilst it is possible that Qohelet is declaring his intention to pour libations, or

<sup>1</sup> Antoon Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth: Part I Grammar* (OLA 41; Leuven: Dept. Oriëntalistiek and Peeters, 1992); *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth: Part II Vocabulary* (OLA 143; Leuven, Paris, Dudley: Dept. Oosterse Studies and Peeters, 2004).

perhaps to mix wine (so Ibn Ezra), it is hard to see how doing so would merit the subsequent dismissal as הבל, or form a basis for his conclusion in the next verse, that fun and pleasure are useless. Some scholars have correspondingly sought to re-organize the text here, linking this expression to Qohelet's subsequent use of wine in 2:3.<sup>2</sup>

It is probably a perception of that difficulty, rather than a variant text, that led the translator of G to parse אנסכה instead as a piel yiqtol/cohortative from נסה, “test”, with a second person object suffix: πειράσω σε, “I shall test you”. This reading is adopted also in the Peshitta (ܐܢܫܚܐ, which may be derived directly from the Greek)<sup>3</sup> and in Jerome's commentary (*temptabo te*), while the Targum and Midrash both seem to understand here the related אנסך, “I will try it”, which *BHS* actually suggests as an emendation. An interpretation in these terms, however, adds the complication of an unusual form – the *plene* writing of the suffix כה, which is quite plausible in itself– without the compensation of a notably better sense: Qohelet is clearly supposed to be investigating pleasure here, not investigating himself or his heart, and the uncontested reading of שמחה with ב permits us only to take pleasure as the instrument or context of any test, not its object. This is a problem even if we take נסה in the

<sup>2</sup> See Naftali Herz Tur-Sinai (= Harry Torczyner), “Dunkle Bibelstellen,” in *Vom alten Testament Karl Marti zum Siebzigsten Geburtstage gewidmet von Freunden, Fachgenossen und Schülern* (ed. K. Budde; BZAW 41; Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1925), 274–80, esp. 279–80; H. Louis Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth* (Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 7–8.

<sup>3</sup> So Abraham S. Kamenetzky, “Die P'siṭa zu Koheleth textkritisch und in ihrem Verhältnis zu dem massoretischen Text, der Septuaginta und den andern alten griechischen Versionen,” *ZAW* 24 (1904): 181–239, esp. 210. The Peshitta of Ecclesiastes seems to be based on both Greek and Hebrew sources, so this dependence is not unusual.

extended sense of “giving experience”: it could not mean “give you experience of pleasure” here, but only “make you experienced by means of pleasure”.<sup>4</sup>

The context suggests that whatever Qohelet is going to do, either intransitively or to himself, pleasure must play a role in the action of a type which will enable him to pronounce on its value in the next verse. It may be helpful, therefore, to consider a further possibility: that we are dealing with a form neither from נסך nor from נסה, but from אנס, “compel”. In Esth 1:8 this is used specifically of forcing people to drink, and in Sir 31:21 (*sub* 31:22 in ms B) of being filled with (ב) too much food (so *DCH*). That verb would give an excellent sense here: Qohelet is to stuff himself, absolutely to fill himself with pleasure, so that there can be no question that he has given it an opportunity to display its value. In terms of form, it seems most probable that we should understand אאנסכ(ה): the omission of one א in our text may be an orthographic variant or the result of a copying error in the sequence נאאאנ.<sup>5</sup>

As for the subsequent וראה בטוב, it is interesting to observe that Ginsberg, writing quite separately about טובה לא ראה in 6:6, suggested taking ראה there as a variant form from רוה, a verb which is used of saturating with liquid, and of drinking beyond the point of satiation or

<sup>4</sup> The idea that נסה + ב could mean “give experience” was first put forward in Moshe Greenberg, “נסה in Exodus 20:20 and the Purpose of the Sinaitic Theophany,” *JBL* 79 (1960): 273–76. His examples include Judg 3:1-3, where the point is that Canaanites were left in the land to give new generations of Israelites experience in fighting, not to give them experience of Canaanites. Such a meaning, in fact, seems appropriate to all the passages cited, and is congruent with other occurrences of the verb meaning “used to (something)”, e.g. 1 Sam 17:39.

<sup>5</sup> Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism* (Library of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament Studies 541; New York & London: T&T Clark, 2012), 58–9, n. 27.

intoxication.<sup>6</sup> Some confusion between the two verbs does indeed seem to be visible elsewhere (cf. Job 10:15; Prov 11:25), and it may be that this is a matter of variant spellings or pronunciations rather than of actual errors in the consonantal text, so Ginsberg's suggestion is not far-fetched, and requires no emendation; it may, however, suit 2:1 better than 6:1. Of course, it is perfectly possible for us to understand **וראה בטוב** here as a reference to "seeing" benefits (cf. Pss 27:13; 106:5; Jer 29:32), so the clause is a little awkward but not inherently problematic. It must be acknowledged, however, that the application of Ginsberg's suggestion to this verse would offer an attractive way to read **אנסכה בשמחה** and **ראה בטוב** as essentially parallel clauses, based on an image of food and drink: "I shall stuff you with pleasure, and you must drench yourself with what is good". If that was indeed the original reading, then although the writer may have intended that the combination would affirm the proper reading of each clause, it is possible that his reference to liquid in fact influenced the subsequent misreading of the first, less familiar verb as from **נסך**.

## 2. כשרון

There are a number of words in Ecclesiastes which do not occur elsewhere in Biblical Hebrew, but the meaning of which can be established beyond reasonable doubt by reference to other words from the same root or to cognate terms in Aramaic: **יתרון** and its counterpart **חסרון** are obvious examples. **כשרון** looks as though it ought to be a further such word, but other words from the stem connote ideas of fitness or suitability, as do their equivalents in Aramaic. That meaning does not seem to accord well with the contexts of **כשרון** in 2:21; 4:4; and 5:10, and is often considered not really to suit the uses of the cognate verb in 11:6. In fact, the context of 11:6 is usually taken to require the very different sense "succeed" or "prosper": you are to sow your seed morning and evening "for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or if both alike will be fine".<sup>7</sup> However, despite the fact that the

<sup>6</sup> H. Louis Ginsberg, **קהלת** (A New Commentary on the Torah, the Prophets and the Holy Writings; Tel-Aviv & Jerusalem: M. Newman, 1961), 192.

<sup>7</sup> So, e.g., Schoors, *The Preacher Sought: Part II*, 448.

Akkadian *kašāru* can refer to success, and so provide an analogy to such a shift in meaning, that shift is not required. It is quite possible that the issue really is the suitability of the seed, and that **יכשר** means not “prosper” but “prove fit”: whether the crops do well depends not on some random fate, but on qualities of the seed that cannot be discerned before sowing, and so we must keep sowing in the hope that some of our seed will prove capable of flourishing in the unknown conditions to come. Since 10:10 is obscure, we cannot say much about the other occurrence of the verb in Ecclesiastes (if **הכשיר** there is even to be construed from the verb), but its sole biblical appearance elsewhere, in Esth 8:5, demands a connotation of fitness or propriety. There is nothing that requires us, therefore, to suppose that **כשר** must ever have a sense in Ecclesiastes different from its normal sense in later Hebrew and in Aramaic.

Correspondingly, we cannot import the meaning “success” into the noun on the basis of the verb, and, since “suitability” or “fitness” seem inappropriate, we are left to understand **כשרון** almost entirely on the basis of its use in three passages:

2:21 **כי יש אדם שעמלו בחכמה ובדעת ובכשרון**

“For there may be a person whose work has been with wisdom and with knowledge and with **כשרון** ...”

4:4 **וראיתי אני את כל עמל ואת כל כשרון המעשה כי קנאת איש מרעהו**

“Then I observed all work and all **כשרון** of labour, that it is an ill feeling (separating) a man from his neighbour.”

5:10 **ברבות הטובה רבו אוכליה ומה כשרון לבעליה כי אם ראית\ראות עיניו**

“As what is good increases, those who consume it increase, and what **כשרון** is there for its owner, apart from looking on?”

Obviously, the first two of these connect **כשרון** with work and with the process of accomplishment: it stands alongside the mental qualities of wisdom and knowledge in 2:21, and in 4:4 is the “**כשרון** of labour” or “of action”. In 5:10, however, it is something of which

one may be deprived, and is apparently associated with the rewards of work. This discrepancy has led scholars commonly to assert two meanings: according to Schoors, for instance, it can connote both “skill” (comparable to חכמה and דעת in 2:21) and the “result of using one’s skill” – that is, “success” or “achievement”.<sup>8</sup> In 5:10, indeed, כשרון is usually given a particular nuance not merely of “success” but of “gain” or “profit”, similar to יתרון. What leads to accomplishment and what flows from accomplishment are surely, however, very different things, and neither sense fits very well in 4:4, where כל עמל and כל כשרון היא are identified as, or with, a feeling that separates people from each other (קנאת־איש מרעהו). If this verse is about motivation, as is usually assumed, then כשרון המעשה has presumably to be imbued with a further connotation of “exercizing skill” or of “achieving success” – it has to relate, in other words, neither to an ability nor to the result of that ability, but to the application of that ability. Particularly in view of the fact that none of them is attested elsewhere, it seems unsatisfactory to grant three, effectively distinct meanings to כשרון in the three verses where it appears, and it seems that little constraint is being placed on the interpretation of the verses individually by any attempt to establish a single, common sense for this term.

In fact, כשרון could be understood in all three verses as a reference to effort, even if something like that sense is only required by 4:4. So, in 2:2 it would indicate the effort or determination which, alongside wisdom and knowledge, Qohelet believes to underpin proper work: this is what someone may put into their business, only to see it pass to someone else, who has made no such investment. In 4:4, it is not skill or success which stems from jealousy, but the motivation and effort of workers. In 5:10, finally, when consumers multiply in proportion to goods, we should understand not that the owner has no “profit” beyond looking on, but either that this is all his effort amounts to (“What is [his] effort to their owner ...”) or that this is the only thing he has any reason still to do (“What can their owner find any determination to do, except ...”). It is interesting in this respect to note that on each occasion G renders the noun using ἀνδρεία (which is also used to render כושרות in Ps 68:7), while the

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 449.

corresponding adjective ἀνδρεῖος is used for הכשיר in 10:10: this is used in Hellenistic Greek of fortitude or determination, rather than simple “manliness”. We may also observe that in Syriac the participle of ܬܠܝܬ is widely attested with the sense “diligent”, “industrious”, often in connection with work. With so little material, it may be impossible for us to catch the precise nuance of כשרון in Qohelet’s usage, but it is economical to suppose that he employs it with only a single meaning, and there are good reasons to believe that he associates it with the effort and motivation of workers.

### 3. סגולה

In Biblical Hebrew, סגולה is most commonly found in descriptions of Israel’s special relationship with God (Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4; Mal 3:17). Unlike others, Israel has been chosen by him to be his own, and the word is conventionally translated in such terms, as “own possession” or suchlike. In 1 Chr 29:3, however, and in Eccl 2:8, it is more often translated as “treasure”, a sense which BDB describes as “very late”. *HALOT* and *DCH*, to be sure, opt respectively for “personal property” and “possessions”, but its juxtaposition with silver and gold in both Chronicles and Ecclesiastes has persuaded commentators that סגולה implies a quantity of wealth, not a type.

The point in 1 Chr 29:3, though, is that David is distinguishing his personal fortune from the valuables that he has provided (and previously listed) for the Temple, and that were presumably, in some sense, possessions of the state or the royal household. He is now offering his “own possessions” as well, and inviting contributions from others. This nuance of specific private ownership is found in the post-biblical usage also. Most notably, in *b. B. Bat.* 52a there is a discussion of property that is in the possession of an individual, but that does not belong to his estate: in the context of this discussion, the advice is offered that money received for safekeeping on behalf of a minor should be made into a סגולה, that is, used to purchase some distinct item of property against which a claim can later be lodged without the need to dismantle other parts of the estate. Similarly, Jastrow lists numerous uses of the verb סגל to indicate money set aside for oneself out of an allowance, or put aside as savings, with no implication that this money need be a significant amount. In both Biblical



and Mishnaic Hebrew, then, the term connotes not high value but distinct or private ownership.

Since Qohelet is undoubtedly asserting in Eccl 2:8 that he had become wealthy, it may seem mere pedantry to assert the importance of that nuance. There are other problems, however, that surround the expression סגלת מלכים והמדינות, and a proper understanding of the noun affirms both that it stands in a construct relationship only with מלכים,<sup>9</sup> since provinces cannot have private property, and that Qohelet is not asserting here his own kingship: if he were a king anyway, it would not be extraordinary for him to have the personal property of a king (even if that were no more than a few coins to rub together). Since the account in chapter 2 is commonly taken to embrace just such an assertion, then a little precision in the handling of the noun may have a lot of implications for interpretation.

#### 4. עמל

This is a very significant term in Ecclesiastes: Schoors notes 22 occurrences of the noun in the book, and 13 of the cognate verb.<sup>10</sup> Its common connotation is of labour, although the noun is apparently used elsewhere to suggest “trouble”, in the senses both of suffering (e.g. Ps 10:14) and of mischief (e.g. Prov 24:2). The latter usage, in particular, indicates that its scope extends beyond the mere act of working, and Ps 7:14-17 speaks of עמל returning upon the head of a man who has conceived it. It is commonly acknowledged that we find an extended sense of the term in Ecclesiastes also, at least in 2:18, where Qohelet speaks of his עמל as something that can be left behind for his successor, but there is no consensus about its actual meaning there, or about the significance of this usage for understanding עמל elsewhere in the book.

<sup>9</sup> Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 25, n. 31. Compare Gen 40:1 משקה מלך מצרים והאפה.

<sup>10</sup> Schoors, *The Preacher Sought: Part II*, 139.

The עמל that Qohelet will leave to his successor in 2:18 is described in the next verse as something over which this successor will have legal rights: וישלט בכל עמלי שעמלתי. In 2:20, furthermore, Qohelet describes how he accordingly let go of his concern with that עמל, and this sequence of verses appears to make it clear that he is talking about something that will not only persist after his death, but that can exist independently of him while he is alive. Something similar seems to be true in 2:11 also, when Qohelet speaks of looking around בעמל שעמלתי לעשות: one does not work to achieve work, so עמל is seemingly a product of labour. This leads many commentators to accept that, at least in 2:18-19, עמל can mean “wealth”, “income” or “gain”.<sup>11</sup> The use of the technical term שלט in 2:19 would be strange, however, if the reference were simply to a bag of gold, and Qohelet seems to have in mind something that is a specific, durable entity, not something that may be dispersed.<sup>12</sup>

The rabbinic use of עמל for “income” is noted by Jastrow, and picked up by some of the commentators who argue for the sense “wealth”, but it is important to note that this usage actually seems to link the term not to wealth *per se*, but to continuing income, or sources of income. Most strikingly, in the discussions about the collection of a daughter’s share from an estate in *b. Ketub.* 69a (cf. *b. B. Bat.* 67a), mention is made of the עמל of houses, which is their immovable, and so collectable, capacity to generate rental income. We do not need to look so far afield for other evidence that עמל may refer to a source of income, and although

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Robert Gordis, *Koheleth – The Man and His World. A Study of Ecclesiastes* (3rd ed.; New York: Schocken, 1968), 223; Schoors, *The Preacher Sought: Part II*, 140. Fabrizio Foresti would extend this sense to about half the occurrences in the book: “‘āmāl in Koheleth: «Toil» or «Profit»,” *Ephemerides Carmeliticae* 31 (1980): 415–30.

<sup>12</sup> On the use of the cognate Aramaic שליט see Douglas M. Gropp, “The Origin and Development of the Aramaic šallīt Clause,” *JNES* 52 (1993): 31–36.

Ps 105:44 is often adduced as evidence for עמל meaning simply the product of work,<sup>13</sup> that text also seems to demonstrate that more than just wealth is meant: when God gives Israel the lands of the nations and they thereby “come into possession of the עמל of the peoples”, it surely does not mean simply that they get to take whatever piles of money or crops are lying around. Rather, Israel takes over the fields, vineyards, and all the other mechanisms which have been produced by the work of the peoples, and which will now be worked to create their own produce (cf. Deut 6:10-11; Josh 24:13). The verb used there of acquiring the עמל is ירש, regularly used of “dispossessing” others, as in, e.g., Deut 2:12 and Jer 8:10 (where the dispossessors take over the fields of wise men, just as “others” take over their wives). Rainey’s suggestion of “trade” may be closer to the mark,<sup>14</sup> but, in the light of such references, is surely too limited: what Qohelet means by עמל in chapter 2 is apparently the infrastructure or capacity that he has been describing in the previous verses 4-7: the vineyards, orchards, forests, slaves and flocks associated with his wealth, which will continue to exist (and to generate an income) even after his death.<sup>15</sup>

Arguably, this does not represent the development of a wholly separate sense for עמל, but exemplifies the sort of semantic shift or extension that permits English words like “business” and “industry” to refer both to personal activities and to entities created by such activities. Even if it is only in chapter 2 that we are compelled to understand it as something other than “labour” in Ecclesiastes, there are other places, such as 5:18, where the idea of עמל as “business” would be quite appropriate. Indeed, in the various expressions like עמלו שיעמל in 1:3 that Qohelet likes to use (cf. 2:11, 18, 19, 20, 22; 5:17; 9:9), it seems quite plausible to suppose that he is always talking about “the business at which one works” rather than just

<sup>13</sup> “Produce” is also, nevertheless, a possible connotation, at least in Aramaic: in 4QEnoch<sup>a</sup> 1 III, 18, the giants consume human עמל until humans can supply them with nothing more, which presumably means that they are eating everything produced.

<sup>14</sup> Anson F. Rainey, “A Second Look at Amal in Qoheleth,” *CTM* 36 (1965): 805.

<sup>15</sup> Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 64–65.

“the labour that one does”. Sometimes the context constrains the sense to “labour”, just as sometimes it excludes that sense, but we should not suppose that Qohelet always has one specific meaning in mind, any more than we would always require “I am at work” in English to mean either “I am working” or “I am at the office”, but never both.

## 5. קלקל

We have already noted the difficulty of 10:10 when discussing בשרון. The verse follows an assertion in 10:9 that workers quarrying stones or chopping logs may, or will, be injured by them, and it either explains that claim, or uses it as the basis for a further saying. The text itself is difficult: something will happen, we are told, אם קהה הברזל (“if the iron/tool is blunt[?]”) and לא פנים קלקל, והוא לא פנים, according to MT (broadly supported by the Targum), but G renders the second clause as *καὶ αὐτὸς πρόσωπον ἐτάραξεν*, which does not reflect the לא. G is followed by the Peshitta here, and Jerome appears to be aware of both readings in his commentary on Ecclesiastes: his translation reads *et hoc non ut prius sed conturbatum erit*, but in his comments on verse 9 he renders as *et faciem eius turbauerit*. Matters are further complicated both by the fact that a reading לו for לא is found in oriental manuscripts of MT, and by the position of לא, which is strange if it is supposed simply to negate the verb. In the light of all these considerations, some commentators have proposed that לא פנים should be emended, perhaps to לא לפנים.<sup>16</sup>

This is not the place to solve the problem as a whole, but it may be apparent that much depends on the meaning of קלקל here. Those scholars who would follow MT and retain לא in לא פנים קלקל generally propose that קלקל means “sharpened”, so the verse would say, “If the tool is blunt and he has not sharpened the edge.” They can point to Ezek 1:7 and Dan 10:6 where a word קלל is used of “burnished” or “polished” bronze, but the relationship of that

<sup>16</sup> So BHK3 and, more forcefully, G.R. Driver, “Problems and Solutions,” VT 4 (1954): 225–45, esp. 232.

word to קלקל here is uncertain, and “polished” is not the same as “sharpened”. It is also difficult to make פנים mean “edge” – Driver, with some justice, calls that an “impossible suggestion”<sup>17</sup> – and so although quite a good case could be made for supposing that the reference here is to polishing the flat surfaces of a tool, if that fitted the context, “sharpened the edge” involves two speculative leaps. Even if we accept those, the position of לא would also suggest “he has sharpened what is not the edge”, rather than “he has not sharpened the edge” (cf. Jer 2:27; 19:17; 32:33).

Another suggestion, to take קלקל with the next clause and in the sense “shake” (the tool)”, understood to mean “swing” it, requires לא פנים to carry a sense like “without an edge”, which seems improbable.<sup>18</sup> That proposal does have the merit, however, of taking seriously the fact that we have קלקל here, and not קלל: whether we treat קלקל as the pilpel of קלל or as effectively a separate verb, we have to give some priority to קלקל in Ezek 21:26 and התקלקלו in Jer 4:24 when assessing the sense.<sup>19</sup> Both of those passages, in fact, point to agitation as the basic meaning: in Ezekiel, the reference is to a form of belomancy, perhaps involving the shaking of arrows in a quiver to mix them (cf. Vulgate *commiscens*), while Jer 4:24 is talking about the quaking of mountains (רעשים). It is difficult to associate that meaning with the long, single movements involved in sharpening or wielding an axe. In connection with פנים, indeed, it is reasonable to suppose that the shaking implied by קלקל is rather the jarring of a blade on a surface, and this is probably what G has understood: *τάρσσω* is used in Jer 4:24 as well, and it commonly refers to physical agitation. Although *πρόσωπον* is not the most

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 232, pointing out that Ezek 21:21 involves a personification.

<sup>18</sup> F. Hitzig, “Der Prediger Salomo’s,” in *Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament: Siebente Lieferung: Die Sprüche Salomo’s von E. Bertheau und Der Prediger Salomo’s von F. Hitzig* (ed. Wilhelm Nowack; S. Hirzel, 1883), 287.

<sup>19</sup> The context of the very difficult לחם הקלקל in Num 21:5 suggests a sense there closer to the normal connotations of disorder or disgrace in Aramaic and in later Hebrew.

obvious choice for “surface” in Greek, it is regularly used for the surface of the ground (e.g. Gen 2:6), so the translator can stay close to the Hebrew here without sacrificing the sense, and G is probably to be understood “he has jarred the surface”, reflecting **והוא פנים קלקל**. If we are to retain MT, then the reference is perhaps to the blow missing the surface at which it is aimed, while emendation to **לא לפנים** would allow the possibility that it has not been delivered straight (cf. Jer 7:24).

All this might be simpler if we were certain that **קהה** in the preceding clause really meant “blunt”,<sup>20</sup> and if we knew what **הכשיר** meant subsequently:<sup>21</sup> the gaps in our knowledge of

<sup>20</sup> The verb is used elsewhere in Biblical Hebrew only of the effect on teeth of sour grapes (Jer 31:29-30; Ezek 18:2), and **קהה** (also **קהי**, **קהא**) is often used with reference to teeth in later texts. It can also imply both weakness and obstinacy, the latter leading some early Jewish interpreters of this passage, including the Targum, to understand the sense “unyielding as iron” here. The most striking later parallel, however, comes in y. Ber. 9:1 63a, when R. Yannai describes how, when Pharaoh had arrested Moses and they tried to cut off his head, **וקהת ההרב מעל צוארו של משה ונשבר** (“the sword bounced off Moses’ neck and was broken”), showing that Moses’ “neck is like an ivory tower” (Song 7:4); R. Abyatar adds that **נתז ההרב**, “the sword flew off” the neck of Moses and on to the neck of the executioner instead, killing him. It is clear that **קהה** is to be understood in this passage, at least, in the sense of a blade taking a deflection or bouncing off a hard surface, which would make good sense in Eccl 10:10, and might fit well with the reading of MT; that meaning may also suit G **ἐκπέσῃ**, “fails”, “falls away”, “goes off course”. In fact, many of the other passages cited by Jastrow from rabbinic literature suggest an association of **קהה** not with bluntness *per se*, but with the resistance of a surface to being cut or the difficulty of cutting hard surfaces.

<sup>21</sup> Even the reading is uncertain: the Kethib **הכשיר** is pointed as an infinitive construct: the versions have read the consonants of the Qere **הכשר**, but have mostly taken it as an adjective, rather than an infinitive absolute. Symmachus, interestingly, renders as **ὁ γοργευσάμενος** (εἰς

Qohelet's vocabulary are made more obvious in this verse, perhaps, than in any other, and we cannot really even state with certainty the relationships of the various clauses to each other or of this verse to the verses that precede and follow it. Despite such ample provision of lexicographical resources, Qohelet seems determined to defy our best efforts to understand him, and to prove that **אם יאמר החכם לדעת לא יוכל למצא**.

*σοφίαν*), “he who has hastened (towards wisdom)”, which might tie in with the understanding of **בשרון** advanced above.